VIDEOGAMES IN EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

HKUST | HUMA 5371 | Fall 2025

Time: Thursdays 3:00 – 5:50pm

Classroom: 3494

Instructor: K.T. Wong

Email: hmktwong@ust.hk

Office Hours: Rm3385; Thursdays 1:30 – 2:30pm or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

While Japan used to dominate the Asian gaming landscape, its East Asian and Southeast Asian neighbors have since developed into major gaming hubs with distinctive characteristics. This course presents a historical and theoretical overview of the cultural, industrial, and technological aspects of videogames within the contexts of East and Southeast Asian nations from the 1970s to the present. In no particular order, we examine the formative influence of Japanese games throughout East and Southeast Asia, study the rise of South Korea and China as centers for online gaming and esports, and survey the emergence of robust national game industries in numerous Southeast Asian nations. While nation is a primary organizing unit, we will study the proposed topics not solely from a national perspective, but also through the lenses of transnational media flow and globalization to shed light on the factors that regionalize videogames as a cultural imagination and an industrial system in East and Southeast Asia.

GRADING:

Participation (20%)

Active participation in class discussion will count toward your final evaluation. Attendance is usually a prerequisite to participation. Repeated unexcused absences negatively impact on your final grade. Plan on having readings completed prior to the date they appear on the syllabus. Class discussions will assume your familiarity with concepts presented in the assigned articles.

Reflection Posts & TWO Responses (30%)

Reflection posts (500-600 words) are due at 10am on Thursdays.

These posts, rather than summarizing the assigned articles, should focus on (1) synthesizing important concepts, and (2) articulating your original insights that emerge from the synthesis. While it is alright to mention external concepts when it proves helpful, the posts should remain

centered on the content of the assigned articles. Strategic use of images or videos (embed or hyperlink) that illustrate or complicate the discussion is also welcome.

In addition to writing your own post, you also need to write responses to TWO of your classmates' posts before class on Thursdays. Posts completed retroactively after class will NOT be counted without prior permission. These responses should be at least 100 words. While these responses are only graded for completion (not doing them will result in a half step deduction in your grades), they should still be directly in response to the content of the posts you are responding to. If these responses are irrelevant or simply verbose to fill up the word count, they will be counted as incomplete.

Discussion Leading (10%)

In addition to actively participating in class discussions throughout the semester, you will be tasked to lead the discussion for one whole class (you may sign up for any week except the first). In lieu of making a formal presentation, you should prepare by creating short introductions for the authors, highlighting relevant passages of text to generate conversation, coming up with questions for discussion, curating images or videos for close analysis, and, in general, considering how to direct and pace the conversation during that week's seminar meeting.

Overall, discussions are dedicated to explicating and questioning key concepts *from that week's assigned articles*, as well as to considering how they relate across concepts we have learned in the seminar to that point. You should be prepared to unpack the articles' central concerns, methodology and sources, and to discuss the larger dialogue the articles participate in.

Final Paper Proposal (10%) [due November 3]

The paper proposal (500-600 words, excluding bibliographies), written like a conference abstract, should clearly lay out the following points: (1) establish the intellectual/methodological context of your paper; (2) explain the specific case-study or work that you wish to examine and provide the necessary background for it; (3) present a series of issues and questions that you will explore in your paper, the answers of which will presumably lead to an articulated thesis in the final paper. The issues/questions for (3) should help to circumscribe the scope of your paper without prescribing a set resolution or thesis.

Concept Map (10%) [due November 28]

A concept map visually connecting the key concepts we learned throughout the course is due at the end of the semester along with a final paper. While you can choose whatever organizing metaphor you feel best represents the outcome of this course for you, as the primary goal of this course is to emphasize the interconnections of gaming cultures within East/Southeast Asia, do avoid organizing these concepts based on geographical boundaries.

Final Paper (20%) [due December 8]

The paper (3000-3500 words, excluding footnotes) should focus on a game-related research question within the context of East/Southeast Asia, with an emphasis on inter/intra-regional connections, that is of interest to you. Incorporating both primary and secondary sources, the

paper should explore the proposed issues through a case study with appropriate methodologies and theoretical frameworks. In addition, your analysis should be supported by citations of (but not limited to) articles covered in the course.

COURSE POLICIES:

Readings:

Assigned articles in PDF can be accessed on Canvas.

Lateness:

Late reflection posts will not be accepted for credit without prior permission. Late papers and assignments will lose a half-letter grade for each day late (A to A-, B+ to B, etc.). Please do not be late for class.

Technology:

Please only use your laptop to refer to readings or to take notes. Phone usage is not permitted unless in case of an emergency.

Email:

I will aim to answer my email within 24 hours during the week and 48 hours over the weekend. Occasionally I might be able to provide an immediate response but not always. This means that I might not be able to respond to emails about an assignment with an immediate due date in a timely manner.

Office Hours:

My office hours are as above; if those times do not work for you, feel free to make an appointment with me by email. Please drop by to discuss the course materials, ask questions about assignments, or even just to talk about game-related topics.

Plagiarism:

Students are expected to abide by the HKUST academic honor code; it is your responsibility to know what plagiarism entails and how to avoid it. Any work submitted by a student for this course for academic credit will be the student's own work.

For more information, refer to this webpage: https://registry.hkust.edu.hk/resource-library/regulations-student-academic-integrity

AI Policy:

In general, usage of AI tools to assist with the writing of assignments for this course is discouraged.

Accommodation for Students with Special Educational Needs:

SEN Support (https://sen.hkust.edu.hk/index.php) is the office on campus that collaborates with students with special educational needs to arrange reasonable accommodation. An authorized SEN officer will communicate with me regarding an accommodation plan after you complete the declaration forms. If you need accommodation that does not fall under the framework of SEN Support, you are welcome to consult me early in the semester.

WEEKLY SCHEDULES (subject to revision):

Week 1: Introduction

September 4

Alisha Karabinus, Carly A. Kocurek, Cody Mejeur, and Emma Vossen. "Introduction: What Game Studies Has Been, What It Could Be." In *Historiographies of Game Studies: What It Has Been, What It Could Be*. Punctum Books: 2025. 17-39.

Phan Quang Anh. "Shifting the Focus to East and Southeast Asia: A Critical Review of Regional Game Research." *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 14 (2021): 173–196.

Kuan-Hsing Chen and Chua Beng Huat. "Introduction: The Inter-Asia Cultural Studies: Movements Project." In *The Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Reader*, edited by Kuan-Hsing Chen and Chua Beng Huat. Routledge, 2007. 1-5.

Week 2: Game Studies - Asia

September 11

Kuan-Hsing Chen. *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization*. Duke University Press, 2010.

Introduction: "Globalization and Deimperialization." 1-16.

Chapter 5: "Asia as Method." 211-255

Epilogue: "The Imperial Order of Things, or Notes on Han Chinese Racism." 257-268.

Chua, Beng Huat. 2025. "Inter-Asia Referencing: Further Methodological Note." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 26 (1): 9–21.

Adrienne Shaw. "What Is Video Game Culture? Cultural Studies and Game Studies." *Games and Culture* 5, no. 4 (2010): 403-424.

Mark J.P. Wolf, editor. *Video Games Around the World*. The MIT Press, 2015.

Mark J.P. Wolf. "Introduction." 1-16

Benjamin Wai-ming Ng. "Hong Kong." 207-217.

Bjarke Liboriussen and Paul Martin. "Regional Game Studies." *Game Studies: The International Journal of Computer Game Research* 16, no. 1 (2016): https://gamestudies.org/1601/articles/liboriussen

Week 3: Videogame History – Media Archaeology – Nintendo

September 18

Martin Picard. "The Foundation of Geemu: A Brief History of Early Japanese Video Games." *Game Studies* 13, no. 2 (December 2013): http://gamestudies.org/1302/articles/picard.

Stephen Kline, Nick Dyer-Witheford, and Greig de Peuter. *Digital Play: The Interaction of Technology, Culture, and Marketing*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003.

Chapter 4: "Origins of an Industry: Cold Warriors, Hackers, and Suits, 1960–1984." 84-108.

Chapter 5: "Electronic Frontiers: Branding the 'Nintendo Generation,'1985–1990." 109-127.

Wendy Hui Kyong Chun. "The Enduring Ephemeral, or The Future Is a Memory." In *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, edited by Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka. University of California Press, 2011. 184-206.

Foost Raessens and Jeffrey Goldstein, editors. *Handbook of Computer Game Studies*. The MIT Press, 2005.

Erkki Huhtamo. Chapter 1: "Slots of Fun, Slots of Trouble: An Archaeology of Arcade Gaming." 3-22.

Steven Malliet and Gust de Meyer. Chapter 2: "The History of the Video Game." 23-46.

Laine Nooney, Raiford Guins, and Henry Lowood. "Introducing ROMchip: What Could the History of Games Be?" *ROMchip: A Journal of Game Histories* 1, no. 1 (2019): https://romchip.org/index.php/romchip-journal/article/view/72

Week 4: Region – Global South – Southeast Asia

September 25

Donald K. Emmerson. "'Southeast Asia': What's in a Name?" *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 15, no. 1 (1984): 1-21.

Cynthia Chou and Vincent Houben. "Introduction." In *Southeast Asian Studies: Debates and New Directions*, edited by Cynthia Chou and Vincent Houben. Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006. 1-22.

Siba Grovogui. "A Revolution Nonetheless: The Global South in International Relations." *The Global South* 5, no. 1: (Spring 2011):175-190.

Peichi Chung. "The Globalization of Game Art in Southeast Asia." In *Routledge Handbook of New Media in Asia*, ed. Larissa Hjorth and Olivia Khoo. Routledge, 2015. 402-415.

Harry Harootunian. "'Memories of Underdevelopment' after Area Studies." *positions* 20, no. 1 (2012): 7–35.

K.T. Wong. "The Data-Driven Myth and the Deceptive Futurity of 'the World's Fastest Growing Games Region': Selling the Southeast Asian Games Market via Game Analytics." *Games and Culture* 18, no. 1 (2023): 42-61.

Newzoo. "Preview of the Southeast Asian Games Market." 2015

Week 5: Informality – Shadow Economy – Piracy

October 2

Dongwon Jo. "'Bursting Circuit Boards': Infrastructures and Technical Practices of Copying in Early Korean Video Game Industry." *Game Studies* 20, no. 2 (June 2020): http://gamestudies.org/2002/articles/jo

Sarah X. T. Liao. "Japanese Console Games Popularization in China: Governance, Copycats, and Gamers." *Games and Culture* 11, no. 3 (2015): 275-297.

Ramon Lobato. *Shadow Economies of Cinema: Mapping Informal Film Distribution*. Bloomsbury, 2012.

"Introduction." 1-8.

Chapter 1: "Distribution from Above and Below." 9-19.

Lars Eckstein and Anja Schwarz. "Introduction: Towards a Postcolonial Critique of Modern Piracy." Postcolonial Piracy: Media Distribution and Cultural Production in the Global South, edited by Lars Eckstein and Anja Schwarz. Bloomsbury, 2014. 1-25.

Lawrence Liang. "Meet John Doe's Order: Piracy, Temporality and the Question of Asia." *Indian Journal of Intellectual Property Law* 2 (2009): 154-170.

Week 6: Nation Branding – Soft Power – Pop Culture

October 9

Koichi Iwabuchi. “Chapter 1: Taking “Japanization” Seriously: Cultural Globalization Reconsidered.” In *Recentering Globalization: Popular Culture and Japanese Transnationalism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004. 23-50.

Koichi Iwabuchi. 2015. “Pop-Culture Diplomacy in Japan: Soft Power, Nation Branding and the Question of ‘International Cultural Exchange.’” *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 21 (4): 419–32.

Joseph S. Nye. “Soft Power: The Evolution of a Concept.” *Journal of Political Power* 14, no. 1 (2021): 196–208.

Ying Fan. “Branding the Nation: What is Being Branded?” *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 12, no. 1 (2006): 5-14.

Fan Yang. “Introduction.” In *Faked in China: Nation Branding, Counterfeit Culture, and Globalization*. Indiana University Press, 2016. 1-30.

Qiaolei Jiang and Anthony Fung. “Games With a Continuum: Globalization, Regionalization, and the Nation-State in the Development of China’s Online Game Industry.” *Games and Culture* 14, no. 7-8 (2017: 801-824.

Week 7: Production Culture – Industry Studies – Globalization

October 16

Brendan Keogh. *The Videogame Industry Does Not Exist: Why We Should Think Beyond Commercial Game Production*. The MIT Press, 2023.

“Introduction.” 1-16.

Chapter 1: “From Videogame Industry to Videogame Fields.” 17-48.

John Caldwell. “Introduction: Industrial Reflexivity and Common Sense.” In *Production Culture: Industrial Reflexivity and Critical Practice in Film and Television*. Duke University Press, 2008. 1-36.

Nick Dyer- Witheford and Greig de Peuter. Chapter 2: “Cognitive Capitalism: Electronic Arts.” In *Games of Empire: Global Capitalism and Video Games*. University of Minnesota Press, 2009. 35-68.

David B. Nieborg. “How to Study Game Publishers: Activision Blizzard’s Corporate History.” In *Game Production Studies*, edited by Olli Sotamaa and Jan Švelch. Amsterdam University Press, 2021. 179-196.

K. T. Wong. “Is Kingdom Hearts a JRPG? The Racialized Labor of a Japanese Anti-auteur’s Disney-Licensed Videogame.” *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* 63.5, no. 1 (Fall 2024): 77–100.

Week 8: Imagined Communities – National Identity – Localization

October 23

Benedict Anderson. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. Verso, 1983.

"Introduction." 1-8.

Chapter 1: "Cultural Roots." 9-36.

John Vanderhoef. "Indie Games of No Nation: The Transnational Indie Imaginary and the Occlusion of National Markers." In *Game History and the Local*, edited by Melanie Swalwell. Palgrave Macmillan, 2021. 159-176.

Miguel A. Bernal-Merino. "A Brief History of Game Localisation." *TRANS* 15 (2011): 11-17.

Rebecca Carlson and Jonathan Corliss. "Imagined Commodities: Video Game Localization and Mythologies of Cultural Difference." Games and Culture 6, no. 1 (2010): 61-82.

Yedong Sh-Chen. "China in the Skin: In Search of a Chinese Video Game." *Prism* 20, no. 2 (2023): 395–416.

K. T. Wong. "Globalization and Heterogeneity: Locating the Malaysian Indie Game Production Culture." *Media Industries* 11, no. 1 (2024): 35-56.

Final Paper Proposal is due at 5pm on November 3, Monday.

Week 9: Review and Workshop

October 30

Final Paper Proposal Workshop

Week 10: Race – Digital Space – Area Studies

November 6

Lisa Nakamura. Chapter 2: "Head-Hunting on the Internet: Identity Tourism, Avatars, and Racial Passing in Textual and Graphic Chat Spaces." In *Cybertypes: Race, Ethnicity, and Identity on the Internet*. Routledge, 2002. 31-60.

Lisa Nakamura. "Don't Hate the Player, Hate the Game: The Racialization of Labor in World of Warcraft." In *Digital Labor: The Internet as Playground and Factory*, edited by Trebor Scholz. Routledge, 2013. 187-202.

Shu-mei Shih. "Racializing Area Studies, Defetishizing China." *positions* 27, no. 1 (2017): 33–65.

Gavin Walker and Naoki Sakai. "The End of Area." *positions* 27, no. 1 (2017): 1–31.

Christopher Patterson and Tara Fickle, editors. Made in Asia/America: Why Video Games Were Never (Really) about Us. Duke University Press, 2024.

"Introduction: Asia / Games \ America." 1-24

"Coda: Role / Play \ Race." 307-317.

Week 11: Competitive Gaming – Techno-Orientalism – Labor

November 13

T. L. Taylor. Chapter 1: "Playing for Keeps." In *Raising the Stakes: E-Sports and the Professionalization of Computer Gaming*. The MIT Press, 2012. 1-33.

Jun-Sok Huhh. "The 'Bang' Where Korean Online Gaming Began: The Culture and Business of the *PC bang* in Korea." In *Gaming Cultures and Place in Asia-Pacific*, ed. Larissa Hjorth and Dean Chan. New York: Routledge, 2009. 102-116.

David S. Roh, Betsy Huang, and Greta A. Niu, editors. *Techno-Orientalism: Imagining Asia in Speculative Fiction, History, and Media*. Rutgers University Press, 2015.

"Technologizing Orientalism: An Introduction." 1-19.

Steve Choe and Se Young Kim. "Never Stop Playing: *StarCraft* and Asian Gamer Death." 113-124.

Bruce Grenville, editor. *The Uncanny: Experiments In Cyborg Culture*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2001.

Toshiya Ueno. "Japanimation and Techno-Orientalism." 223-231.

"The Shock Projected onto the Other: Notes on Japanimation and Techno-Orientalism." 232-236.

Zixue Tai and Fengbin Hu. "Play between Love and Labor: The Practice of Gold Farming in China." *New Media & Society* 20, no. 7 (July 2018): 2370–2390.

Tara Fickle. "Made in China: Gold Farming as Alternative History of Esports." *ROMchip* 3, no. 1 (2021): https://www.romchip.org/index.php/romchip-journal/article/view/132

Week 12: Esports – Mega-Events – Inter/nationalism

November 20

Richard Gruneau and John Horne, editors. *Mega Events and Globalization: Capital and Spectacle in a Changing World Order*. Routledge, 2016.

"Mega-Events and Globalization: A Critical Introduction." 1-25.

Michael Borowy and Jin, Dal Yong. "Mega Events of the Future: The Experience Economy, the Korean Connection and the Growth of eSport." 206-219.

Brett Hutchins. "Signs of meta-change in second modernity: the growth of e-sport and the World Cyber Games." *New Media & Society* 10, no. 6 (2008): 851-869.

Riikka Turtiainen, Usva Friman, and Maria Ruotsalainen. "'Not Only for a Celebration of Competitive Overwatch but Also for National Pride': Sportificating the Overwatch World Cup 2016." *Games and Culture* 15, no. 4 (2018): 351-371.

Marcella Szablewicz. "A Realm of Mere Representation? 'Live' E-Sports Spectacles and the Crafting of China's Digital Gaming Image." *Games and Culture* 11.3 (2016): 256-274.

Milan Ismangil. "(Re)creating the Nation Online: Nationalism in Chinese Dota 2 Fandom." *Asiascape: Digital Asia* 5 (2018): 198-224.

Week 13: Presentation

November 27

Short presentation of Concept Maps.

Concept Map due at 5pm on November 28, Friday.

Final Paper due at 5pm on December 8, Monday.